



OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

MEMORANDUM

The Expulsion from Egypt — Some Consequences for the Soviets

~~Secret~~
29 August 1972

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

29 August 1972

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Expulsion from Egypt -- Some Consequences
for the Soviets

For years, the picture of the Soviet role in the Middle East has been one of spreading influence, increasing presence, and ever more ambitious aims. The Soviets met occasional setbacks and proceeded opportunistically, by fits and starts, but the trend was unmistakably in their favor. Events in Egypt during the past few weeks have checked this trend in sharp and dramatic fashion and -- though it is too early to be confident in such a judgment -- may have reversed it. The Soviets have also been encountering difficulties elsewhere in the region. These developments must be raising serious questions in Moscow about the premises on which Soviet policy has rested. A recent ONE Memorandum ("The Russian Ouster -- Causes and Consequences", 22 August 1972) analyzed the situation from the Egyptian point of view. This assessment does the same thing from the Soviet standpoint -- both in terms of the Soviet experience in Egypt and its broader implications.

* This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and discussed with other components of the CIA, who are in general agreement with its judgments.

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1. It now seems clear that when the withdrawal of Soviet military personnel from Egypt has been completed only a remnant of the Soviet presence will remain; in both size and scope it will have been drastically reduced. The overall relationship, in which military ties have played such a central part, has obviously also been greatly affected, though this is in flux and it may be some time before the character of what Sadat has called a "new stage" in Soviet-Egyptian relations is apparent. Both sides have an interest in seeing that the former relationship is not totally destroyed, yet there is room for further deterioration. In any event, the Russians have a long way to come back in Egypt and their prospects there and in the Middle East as a whole no longer look nearly as bullish as they once did.

How the Russians Hurt Themselves

2. The Soviets did their share to bring about this result.

- ① The pervasiveness of the Soviet military presence was an affront to Egyptian national pride, and the Soviet military were frequently clumsy and overbearing toward their Egyptian counterparts. ② Much of the Soviet activity at Egyptian ports and air bases served Soviet, not Egyptian, interests; ③ the Soviets were increasingly exercising local control over those installations and turning them into exclusive enclaves. ④ The Russians constantly reminded the

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Egyptians that they were far from ready for another round of fighting with the Israelis and made it plain to the Egyptians that this was one of the last things they, the Russians, wanted to see happen. ^(S) The Egyptians concluded, no doubt rightly, that Moscow was regulating the flow of military supplies with this in mind and was thus robbing the Egyptians of the ultimate right to decide whether to fight or seek peace.

3. There were other sources of Egyptian resentment. One was the substantial and much-publicized spurt ⁽¹⁾ in the migration of Jews from the USSR to Israel. ⁽²⁾ The USSR's growing closeness to Iraq, signified by the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship (April 1972), and Moscow's unsuccessful attempts to secure a similar arrangement with Syria, also bothered Cairo. It saw in these developments an erosion of Egypt's special relationship with Moscow and probably evidence of the broad scope of Soviet aims in the Middle East.

4. To some extent, such frictions and suspicions were an inevitable, even normal, feature of the Soviet-Egyptian relationship. With someone more secure domestically and less erratic than Sadat they might have counted less heavily against the Russians. Nevertheless, the Soviet dilemma was real and in the end insoluble: Soviet and Egyptian interests overlapped but were not identical.

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The Egyptians saw the US-Soviet summit meeting as emphatic confirmation of this fact and as final proof that the USSR could and would do very little to help them recover their lost lands. The Russians had not built a strong enough foundation in Cairo to bear the weight of this failure.

5. The Soviets have never felt secure in a relationship which depended so heavily on military support and the exigencies of the Arab-Israeli conflict. They have wanted a less tenuous and less hazardous basis for their presence in Egypt. At the same time, they have been trying to reinsure and to build for the future by strengthening their influence in other radical Arab states. They have also seen enough of Sadat to know that he is not their man.

Nevertheless, the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship (May 1971) must have seemed to the Russians to have brought some order and control into the relationship. Economic links had been growing, too. Prickly and unpredictable as Sadat might be, it must have seemed to the Soviets that he needed them more than they needed him. They were uneasy -- perhaps increasingly so -- but they could not have expected to be hit as hard as they were.

The Immediate Impact in the Area

6. The Soviets have managed to ride out previous setbacks in Egypt and elsewhere in the Third World. And their position has

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not collapsed as it did in Indonesia, Ghana, and more recently, in the Sudan. Yet Egypt has meant more to them than these other states. They extended themselves much further there in terms of aid given and military risks taken and in return had gained, or at least hoped they had gained, commensurately in international power and prestige.

7. The Soviet withdrawal will have an adverse impact on Soviet naval -- particularly naval air -- capabilities, present and potential, in the Mediterranean. The full extent of this impact is not yet measurable. But there is little likelihood in present circumstances that any of the other Arab littoral states will provide the Soviets with substitutes for the full array of facilities in Egypt from which they were conducting maritime reconnaissance, electronic monitoring and ASW operations in support of the Soviet Mediterranean naval force. The Soviets apparently still have access to repair and resupply facilities in Egyptian ports which permits them to extend the patrol life of their ships and submarines in the Mediterranean. They will, however, certainly be using these facilities on a more restricted basis (and it is doubtful that a fuller use of Syrian facilities would do more than take up some of the slack, even if the Syrians were willing to offer them). The Soviets will, in any case, recognize (as the

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influential Heikal of *al Ahrām* has reminded them) that the remaining facilities in Egypt can also be withdrawn and cannot be confidently counted on for military-planning purposes.

8. Neither Syria nor Iraq seems disposed at the moment to follow Egypt's lead by cutting back ties with Moscow. They might, in fact, now see fewer dangers to themselves in doing business with the Russians simply because it has been shown that they can be gotten rid of. They might also reason that they are now in a position to obtain additional favors from Moscow on the cheap. But to the extent that the Egyptian experience is seen as a demonstration of the limits of Soviet power, the Soviets must look less awesome to the other Arab states as a factor in the area.

9. Whether the setback in Egypt will produce political recriminations within the Soviet leadership is a point on which, at this stage, not much can usefully be ventured. That it has caused bitterness and even anxiety in Moscow there can be little doubt. Some in positions of influence may see it as one of the prices paid for the current policy of detente and ask whether the price is worth paying. Certainly, by any reckoning, the Egyptian misadventure, coming on top of the embarrassing agricultural shortages which have developed, must count as one of the most serious present liabilities for Brezhnev and his political allies.

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But this might be partly offset by relief at the prospect of an easing of an arms burden and a military commitment which have been questioned at lower party levels. At the same time, the credit which Moscow is likely to win abroad for having shown good sense and military restraint in the Arab-Israeli context should do it some good, particularly in its relations with the US and the Europeans, and thereby help the leadership's domestic position.

Soviet Policy Options in the Middle East

10. The status quo ante July 18 in Soviet-Egyptian relations is not likely to be restored soon, if ever. How the Russians proceed from here will depend to some extent on what the Egyptians do and say, for the Russians are not without their own sensitivities. Already, by continuing to expose their grievances against the Russians openly, the Egyptians have begun to produce some cracks in the stolid public front Moscow had adopted after the expulsion order, and the Soviets are now beginning to respond with some heat. Once launched, a process of verbal give-and-take could, whatever the intent of the two sides, make it more difficult for them to control their next moves.

11. But the Soviets would seem to have three general courses open to them. The first of these would be for Moscow to distance

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itself from Cairo, letting its military and economic ties with Egypt wither over time, and giving reduced priority to its position in the Middle East generally. Seeing itself treated as a whipping-boy by the Egyptians and much of the effort and expenditure of the last fifteen years gone to waste, Moscow must experience some urge to do this. But Moscow's commitment to playing a global role and its belief in the high strategic importance of the Middle East is unlikely to lead it in this direction.

12. A second course would be a punitive policy aimed at forcing the Sadat regime to heel or even ousting it. Moscow might severely curtail or end the flow of military and economic assistance and actively work against Cairo politically and diplomatically. Perhaps Moscow could try to organize Sadat's overthrow from within, but this would be a gamble for the Russians, on the kind of long odds they usually do not care for, since the means available to them for this purpose are probably scarce at best. In general, the chances that the Russians could succeed in a policy of pressures and covert manipulation would appear to be slight and the cost of failure high.

13. A third course, one which would be more in character for Moscow and more in accord with the reflexes of its

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policy-making bureaucracy, would be to attempt to ride out the present difficult period. Moscow might believe that at this delicate juncture a hard line on its part would merely serve to deepen the estrangement and encourage Egypt to move further to the right in its domestic policies and in the direction of firm non-alignment in its international position; it could also hurt the Russians with the other radical Arab states. At the same time, the Soviets might suppose that if they remain patient, the natural political and social trends within Egypt; their substantial involvement in Egypt's economic development and trade, and the intractability of the Arab-Israeli conflict will sooner or later force Egypt back toward the USSR. In pursuing such a policy, the Russians would probably continue to deliver new military equipment already contracted for by the Egyptians and spare parts for that already in Egyptian hands. They would avoid a conspicuous decrease in economic assistance, though Cairo might very well find the Russians turning stingier in terms of assistance given and repayment terms demanded.

14. Even if this course, the most likely one, is chosen, it is hard to believe that the Soviet relationship with Sadat can ever be the same again or that the Russians will soon again be in a mood to bestow lavish military or economic assistance -- on the

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scale of the past five years -- on the Egyptians. To do so would be to reward them for their abuse and perhaps to encourage others to behave similarly. The Soviets will not wish Sadat well, if they ever did, nor will they want to give him aid and comfort in his domestic difficulties. And while, as has been said, they would probably not want to risk failure in an attempt to bring about his downfall, it is entirely believable that they would be willing to give him an extra push if he seemed to be slipping.

15. For the same reasons that they are not likely to go back entirely on their other commitments to the Egyptians, the Russians can be expected to remain strong advocates of the Arab position vis-a-vis Israel. They no doubt believe that their international stature and the influence that remains to them in the Arab world assures them a significant voice in the affairs of the area. They may, in addition, now feel less inhibited about opening up channels of communication with the Israelis. They will, in any event, continue to claim a prominent role in discussions with respect to an Arab-Israeli dispute. They could suppose that influence lost in Cairo, in some part because of the detente in US-Soviet relations, is offset by influence gained in Washington.

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16. It is possible that, in the setting of a changing relationship with both Egypt and the US, the prospect of playing a constructive role in an Arab-Israeli settlement would have greater attraction for the Soviets than before. It seems at least as likely, however, that the Soviet position will remain unconstructive: though the Soviets have long considered an Arab-Israeli *modus vivendi* to be preferable to a new war, the immediate military danger to themselves is now greatly reduced, and they might see in a continuing political stalemate the best promise of regaining influence in Cairo. In any case, the obstacles to progress toward a settlement remain great, and it is hard to see what the Soviets could or would be willing to do to surmount them.

Broader Implications for the Soviets in the Third World

17. The particular circumstances which led to the great increase in Soviet political and military strength in Egypt, and which have now contributed to their sharp decrease, have been in many ways unique. Nevertheless, Moscow has viewed Egypt as crucial to its position in the Middle East and has regarded the special relationship with Cairo as the crowning success of its policy in the area. While this was intact, other Soviet disappointments and setbacks were less noticeable. But the doubt which now hangs over

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the Soviet-Egyptian relationship serves as a reminder that much has gone against the Russians in the Arab world in recent years.

18. The hopes which Moscow had for Algeria and, later, Libya have not been fulfilled; the former continues to keep the Soviets at arm's length and the latter is militantly anti-Soviet. The Sudan has turned into something like a dead loss. The Syrians have managed to keep Soviet aid coming without accepting Soviet tutelage. Soviet influence in Yemen, which grew dramatically in 1967 and 1968, has more recently declined precipitously. And in Somalia, though pro-Soviet elements are at present dominant, there are signs of underlying discontent with the Soviet connection. Only in Iraq have the Soviets made some headway of late, but further progress there might very soon begin to cause problems for the Russians in their relations with Iran.

19. The Soviets can and will tell themselves that time is on their side in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Third World, but this is an ideological conviction, not a practical political precept. The hopes once vested in so-called "revolutionary democratic" leaders, who as the Soviets rationalized, could be counted on to develop domestic and foreign policies favorable to Soviet interests, have been frequently and severely disappointed. The appeal to self-interest through the medium of military and

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economic assistance, has produced mixed results. Reliance on Third World Communist parties holds little promise for Moscow. Its support for these parties has often resulted in grave damage to the Soviet position, as in the Sudan. In certain cases, e.g., Syria and Iraq, the Soviets have continued to work for greater participation of Communists in government. Nevertheless, it is evident that Moscow does not look for most local Communist parties to contribute much, if anything, to the growth of Soviet influence in the Third World in the near term.

20. Thus, neither ideological affinity nor material assistance has provided a sure channel of influence for the Soviets within the so-called "national liberation movement". They have all along underrated the national element in the slogan, and they have shown themselves lacking in sensitivity to the cultural peculiarities of Third World societies greatly different from their own. Moreover, they have expected their friends in the underdeveloped world to adopt a gradualist approach to domestic development and to be patient about their regional conflicts and aspirations. They have also expected these states to understand that, because the USSR is conducting a broad, global policy, it must from time to time give second place to more parochial issues. Their friends in the Third World have quite naturally not seen matters the same way.

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21. This is not to suggest either that the Soviets have a policy which embraces the entire Third World (as Khrushchev, in his salad days, supposed he had) or that their involvement there is likely to recede sharply. Moscow has in recent years inclined more and more to a differentiated approach to the widely scattered and diverse states covered by the term Third World. The trend has also been toward a more selective approach to economic assistance to developing states. At the same time, the Soviets have been quick to come forward with arms and other forms of military assistance, seeking in this way to gain wide political influence locally and to extend their capabilities for world-wide military operations.. The bases established by the Soviets in Egypt represented a signal success for these efforts. This progress has been dramatically interrupted. We would not expect the Soviets to discontinue their efforts in this direction. But the political and military complications which face them must be more evident than before. Moscow will probably now, on this account, begin to give greater emphasis in its military planning to arrangements (e.g., afloat support) which are less dependent on the sufferance of unpredictable and uncontrolled regional states.

22. We have noted (in "The Uses of Soviet Military Power in Distant Areas", NIE 11-10-71, 15 December 1971) the impressive

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progress the USSR has made in the last decade in developing political influence in the Third World; that it is anxious to demonstrate that, as a world power, it has legitimate interests everywhere; and that Moscow now has the ability to support policies in distant areas and a greater capability than in earlier years to extend its military presence. Recent developments suggest, however, that stronger emphasis ought now be given to some further observations made in that Estimate, viz., that Soviet activities in remote areas have not met with unqualified success and there are a variety of circumstances which impose constraints on Soviet policies, among them the complexities of the Third World itself and the inhibitions imposed on Moscow by its broader objectives.

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